

Deism

Deism (/ˈdiːɪzəm/ *DEE-iz-əm*^{[1][2]} or /ˈdeɪ.ɪzəm/ *DAY-iz-əm*; derived from Latin "deus" meaning "god") is the philosophical position that rejects revelation as a source of religious knowledge and asserts that reason and observation of the natural world are sufficient to establish the existence of a Supreme Being or creator of the universe.^{[3][4][5]}

At least as far back as Thomas Aquinas, Christian thought has recognized two sources of knowledge of God: revelation and "natural reason". The study of the truths revealed by reason is called natural theology. During the Age of Enlightenment, especially in Britain and France, philosophers began to reject revelation as a source of knowledge and to appeal only to truths that they felt could be established by reason alone. Such philosophers were called "deists" and the philosophical position that they advocated is called "deism".

Deism as a distinct intellectual movement declined toward the end of the 18th century. Some of its tenets continued to live on as part of other intellectual movements, like Unitarianism, and it continues to have advocates today.

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Enlightenment deism

Origin of the word *deism*

The words *deism* and *theism* are both derived from words meaning "god": Latin *deus* and Greek *theos* (θεός). The word *déiste* first appears in French in 1564 in a work by a Swiss Calvinist named Pierre Viret^[6] but was generally unknown in France until the 1690s when Pierre Bayle published his famous Dictionary, which contained an article on Viret.^[7]

In English the words *deist* and *theist* were originally synonymous, but by the 17th century the terms started to diverge in meaning.^[8] The term *deist* with its current meaning first appears in English in Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621).

Herbert of Cherbury and early English deism

The first major statement of deism in English is Lord Herbert of Cherbury's book *De Veritate* (1624).^[9] Herbert, like his contemporary Descartes, searched for the foundations of knowledge. The first two-thirds of his book *De Veritate (On Truth, as It Is Distinguished from Revelation, the Probable, the Possible, and the False)* are devoted to an exposition of Herbert's theory of knowledge. Herbert distinguished truths obtained through experience and reasoning about experience, from innate truths and from revealed truths. Innate truths are imprinted on our minds, and the evidence that they are so imprinted is that they are universally accepted. Herbert's term for universally accepted truths was *notitiae communes* – Common Notions. When it came to religion, Herbert believed that there were five Common Notions.



Edward Herbert, portrait by Isaac Oliver (1560–1617)

- There is one Supreme God.
- He ought to be worshipped.
- Virtue and piety are the chief parts of divine worship.
- We ought to be sorry for our sins and repent of them.
- Divine goodness dispenses rewards and punishments, both in this life and after it.

Herbert himself had relatively few followers, and it was not until the 1680s that Herbert found a true successor in Charles Blount (1654–1693).^[10]

The flowering of deism, 1696–1801

The appearance of John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) marks an important turning point, and a new phase, in the history of English deism. Herbert's epistemology was based on the idea of "common notions", in effect, on innate ideas. Locke's famous attack on innate ideas in the *Essay* effectively destroyed that foundation. After Locke, deists could no longer appeal to innate ideas as Herbert had done. Instead, deists were forced to turn to arguments based on experience and nature. Under the influence of Newton they turned to the argument from design as the principal argument for the existence of God.^[11]

Peter Gay identifies John Toland's *Christianity not Mysterious* (1696), and the "vehement response" it provoked as the beginning of post-Locke deism. Among the notable figures, Gay describes Toland and Matthew Tindal as the best known, but Gay considered them to be talented publicists rather than philosophers

or scholars. He regards Middleton and Anthony Collins as contributing more to the substance of debate; in contrast with fringe writers such as Thomas Chubb and Thomas Woolston.^[12]

Other British deists prominent during the period include William Wollaston, Charles Blount, Henry St John, 1st Viscount Bolingbroke,^[13] and, in the latter part, Peter Annet, Thomas Chubb and Thomas Morgan. Anthony Ashley-Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury was also influential. Though not presenting himself as a deist, he shared many of the deists' key attitudes and is now usually regarded as a deist.^[14]

Especially noteworthy is Matthew Tindal's *Christianity as Old as the Creation* (1730), which "became, very soon after its publication, the focal center of the deist controversy. Because almost every argument, quotation, and issue raised for decades can be found here, the work is often termed 'the deist's Bible'."^[15] Following Locke's successful attack on innate ideas, Tindal's 'Bible' redefined the foundation of deist epistemology as knowledge based on experience or human reason. This effectively widened the gap between traditional Christians and what he called "Christian Deists", since this new foundation required that "revealed" truth be validated through human reason.

Aspects of Enlightenment deism

Enlightenment deism consisted of two philosophical assertions: (a) reason, along with features of the natural world, is a valid source of religious knowledge, and (b) revelation is not a valid source of religious knowledge. Different deist authors expanded on these two assertions to create what Leslie Stephen later termed the "constructive" and "critical" aspects of deism.^{[16][17]} "Constructive" assertions— assertions that deist writers felt were justified by appeals to reason and features of the natural world (or perhaps were intuitively obvious) — included:^{[18][19]}

- God exists and created the universe.
- God gave humans the ability to reason.

"Critical" assertions— assertions that followed from the denial of revelation as a valid source of religious knowledge— were much more numerous. They included:

- Rejection of all books, including the Bible, that are claimed to contain divine revelation.^[20]
- Rejection of the incomprehensible notion of the Trinity and other religious "mysteries".
- Rejection of reports of miracles, prophecies, etc.

The origins of religion

A central premise of deism was that the religions of their day were corruptions of an original religion that was pure, natural, simple, and rational. Humanity lost this original religion when it was subsequently corrupted by "priests" who manipulated it for personal gain and for the class interests of the priesthood,^[21] and encrusted it with superstitions and "mysteries" – irrational theological doctrines. Deists referred to this manipulation of religious doctrine as "priestcraft," an intensely derogatory term.^[22] In the eyes of deists, this corruption of natural religion was designed to keep laymen baffled by "mysteries" and dependent on the priesthood for information about the requirements for salvation— this gave the priesthood a great deal of power, which the priesthood naturally worked to maintain and increase. Deists saw it as their mission to strip away "priestcraft" and "mysteries". Tindal, perhaps the most prominent deist writer, claimed that this was the proper original role of the Christian Church.^[23]

One implication of this premise was that current-day primitive societies, or societies that existed in the distant past, should have religious beliefs less encrusted with superstitions and closer to those of natural theology. This position became less and less plausible as thinkers such as David Hume began studying the natural history of

religion and suggested that the origins of religion lay not in reason but in emotions such as the fear of the unknown.

Immortality of the soul

Different deists had different beliefs about the immortality of the soul, about the existence of Hell and damnation to punish the wicked, and the existence of Heaven to reward the virtuous. Anthony Collins,^[24] Bolingbroke, Thomas Chubb, and Peter Annet were materialists and either denied or doubted the immortality of the soul.^[25] Benjamin Franklin believed in reincarnation or resurrection. Lord Herbert of Cherbury and William Wollaston,^[26] held that souls exist, survive death, and in the afterlife are rewarded or punished by God for their behavior in life. Thomas Paine believed in the "probability" of immortality of the soul.^[27]

Prayer and worship

Influenced by Newton's cosmology, many deists regarded God as a distant Creator who wound up the universe, set it in motion, and then stepped away. These deists naturally considered it to be pointless to pray to or worship a God who surely was not listening. Others, however, felt a closer connection to God and believed that God heard and responded to their prayers.

Miracles and divine providence

The most natural position for deists was to reject all forms of supernaturalism, including the miracle stories in the Bible. The problem was that the rejection of miracles also seemed to entail the rejection of divine providence (of God taking a hand in human affairs), something that many deists were inclined to accept.^[28] Those who believed in a watch-maker God rejected the possibility of miracles and divine providence. They believed that God, after establishing natural laws and setting the cosmos in motion, stepped away. He didn't need to keep tinkering with his creation, and the suggestion that he did was insulting.^[29] Others, however, firmly believed in divine providence and so were reluctantly forced to accept at least the possibility of miracle. God was, after all, all-powerful, and He could do whatever he wanted, including temporarily suspending his own natural laws.

Freedom and necessity

Enlightenment thinkers, under the influence of Newtonian science, tended to view the universe as a vast machine, created and set in motion by a creator being, that continues to operate according to natural law, without any divine intervention. This view naturally led to what was then called necessitarianism^[30] (the modern term is determinism): the view that everything in the universe – including human behavior – is completely causally determined by antecedent circumstances and natural law. (See, for example, La Mettrie's *L'Homme machine* (<http://www.cscs.umich.edu/~crshalizi/LaMettrie/Machine/>.) As a consequence, debates about freedom versus "necessity" were a regular feature of Enlightenment religious and philosophical discussions. Reflecting the intellectual climate of the time, there were differences among deists about freedom and determinism. Some, such as Anthony Collins, actually were necessitarians.^[31]

David Hume

Views differ on whether David Hume was a deist, an atheist, or something else.^[32] Like the deists, he rejected revelation, and his famous essay "On Miracles" provided a powerful argument against belief in miracles. On the other hand, he did not believe that an appeal to Reason could provide any justification for religion. In *Natural History of Religion* (1757) he contends that polytheism, not monotheism, was "the first and most

ancient religion of mankind" and that the psychological basis of religion is not reason, but fear of the unknown.^[33] Hume's account of ignorance and fear as the motivations for primitive religious belief was a severe blow to the deist's rosy picture of prelapsarian humanity basking in priestcraft-free innocence. In Waring's words:

The clear reasonableness of natural religion disappeared before a semi-historical look at what can be known about uncivilized man — "a barbarous, necessitous animal," as Hume termed him. Natural religion, if by that term one means the actual religious beliefs and practices of uncivilized peoples, was seen to be a fabric of superstitions. Primitive man was no unspoiled philosopher, clearly seeing the truth of one God. And the history of religion was not, as the deists had implied, retrograde; the widespread phenomenon of superstition was caused less by priestly malice than by man's unreason as he confronted his experience.^[34]



David Hume

Deism in the United States

Until 1776 the (now) United States were colonies of the British empire and Americans, as British subjects, were influenced by and participated in the intellectual life of England and Great Britain. English deism was an important influence on the thinking of Thomas Jefferson and the principles of religious freedom asserted in the First Amendment to the United States Constitution. Other "Founding Fathers" who were influenced to various degrees by deism were Ethan Allen,^[35] Benjamin Franklin, Cornelius Harnett, Gouverneur Morris, Hugh Williamson, James Madison, and possibly Alexander Hamilton.

In the United States, there is a great deal of controversy over whether the Founding Fathers were Christians, deists, or something in between.^{[36][37]} Particularly heated is the debate over the beliefs of Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and George Washington.^{[38][39][40]}



Thomas Paine

In his "Autobiography" Franklin wrote that as a young man "*Some books against Deism fell into my hands; they were said to be the substance of sermons preached at Boyle's lectures. It happened that they wrought an effect on me quite contrary to what was intended by them; for the arguments of the Deists, which were quoted to be refuted, appeared to me much stronger than the refutations; in short, I soon became a thorough Deist.*"^{[41][42]} Like some other deists, Franklin believed that, "The Deity sometimes interferes by his particular Providence, and sets aside the Events which would otherwise have been produc'd in the Course of Nature, or by the Free Agency of Man,"^[43] and stated at the Constitutional Convention that "the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth— that God governs in the affairs of men."^[44]

Thomas Jefferson is perhaps the Founding Father who most clearly exhibits deist tendencies, although he generally referred to himself as a Unitarian rather than a deist. His excerpts of the Biblical gospels, for example, now commonly known as the Jefferson Bible, strips all supernatural and dogmatic references from the Christ story. Like Franklin, Jefferson believed in God's continuing activity in human affairs.^[45]

Thomas Paine is especially noteworthy both for his contributions to the cause of the American revolution and to the cause of deism. His *The Age of Reason* (Parts I and II in 1794 and 1795) was short, readable, and is probably the only deist tract that continues to be read, and to be influential, today.^[46]

The last contributor to American deism was Elihu Palmer (1764–1806), who wrote the "Bible of American deism", *Principles of Nature*, in 1801. Palmer is noteworthy for attempting to bring some organization to deism by founding the "Deistical Society of New York" and other deistic societies from Maine to Georgia.^[47]

Deism in France and continental Europe

France had its own tradition of religious skepticism and natural theology in the works of Montaigne, Bayle, and Montesquieu. The most famous of the French deists was Voltaire, who was exposed to Newtonian science and English deism during his two-year period of exile in England (1726-8). When he returned to France he brought both back with him, and exposed the French reading public (i.e. the aristocracy) to them in a number of books.

French deists also included Maximilien Robespierre and Rousseau. During the French Revolution the deistic Cult of the Supreme Being, a direct expression of Robespierre's theological views, was established briefly - just under three months - as the new state religion of France, replacing the deposed Catholic Church and rival atheistic Cult of Reason.

Deism in Germany is not well documented. We know from his correspondence with Voltaire that Frederick the Great was a deist. Immanuel Kant's identification with deism is controversial.^[48]



Voltaire at age 24
by Nicolas de Largillière

Decline of Enlightenment deism

Gay describes Enlightenment deism as entering slow decline, as a recognisable movement, in the 1730s.^[49] A number of reasons have been suggested for this decline.^[50]

- the increasing influence of naturalism and materialism
- the writings of David Hume and Immanuel Kant raised questions about the ability of reason to address metaphysical questions.
- the violence of the openly-deistic French Revolution
- Christian revivalist movements, such as Pietism and Methodism, which emphasized a personal relationship with God, along with the rise of anti-rationalist and counter-Enlightenment philosophies such as that of Johann Georg Hamann.^[50]

Although deism has declined in popularity over time, philosophers believe that these ideas still have lingering influence on society. One of the major activities of the deists, biblical criticism, evolved into its own highly technical discipline. Deist rejection of revealed religion evolved into, and contributed to, 19th-century liberal British theology and the rise of Unitarianism.^[50]

Contemporary deism

Contemporary deism attempts to integrate classical deism with modern philosophy and the current state of scientific knowledge. This attempt has produced a wide variety of personal beliefs under the broad classification of belief of "deism."

There are a number of subcategories of modern deism, including **monodeism** (this being the default standard concept of deism), pandeism, spiritual deism, process deism, Christian deism, polydeism, scientific deism, and humanistic deism.^{[51][52][53]} Some deists see design in nature and purpose in the universe and in their lives. Others see God and the universe in a co-creative process. Some deists view God in classical terms and see God as observing humanity but not directly intervening in our lives, while others see God as a subtle and persuasive spirit who created the world and then stepped back to observe. Most contemporary deists do not believe in divine intervention, but some still find value in prayer as a form of meditation, self-cleansing, and spiritual renewal.

Recent philosophical discussions of deism

In the 1960s, theologian Charles Hartshorne scrupulously examined and rejected both deism and pandeism (as well as pantheism) in favor of a conception of God whose characteristics included "absolute perfection in some respects, relative perfection in all others" or "AR", writing that this theory "is able consistently to embrace all that is positive in either deism or pandeism", concluding that "panentheistic doctrine contains all of deism and pandeism except their arbitrary negations".^[54]

Charles Taylor, in his 2007 book *A Secular Age*, showed the historical role of deism, leading to what he calls an exclusive humanism. This humanism invokes a moral order, whose ontic commitment is wholly intra-human, with no reference to transcendence.^[55] One of the special achievements of such deism-based humanism is that it discloses new, anthropocentric moral sources by which human beings are motivated and empowered to accomplish acts of mutual benefit.^[56] This is the province of a buffered, disengaged self, which is the locus of dignity, freedom and discipline, and is endowed with a sense of human capability.^[57] According to Taylor, by the early 19th century this deism-mediated exclusive humanism developed as an alternative to Christian faith in a personal God and an order of miracles and mystery. Some critics of deism have accused adherents of facilitating the rise of nihilism.^[58]

Deism in contemporary America

The 2001 American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS) survey estimated that between 1990 and 2001 the number of self-identifying deists grew from 6,000 to 49,000, representing about 0.02% of the US population at the time.^[59] The 2008 ARIS survey found, based on their stated beliefs rather than their religious identification, that 70% of Americans believe in a personal God, roughly 12% are atheist or agnostic, and 12% believe in "a deist or paganistic concept of the Divine as a higher power" rather than a personal God.^[60]

The term "ceremonial deism" was coined in 1962 and has been used since 1984 by the Supreme Court of the United States to assess exemptions from the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, thought to be expressions of cultural tradition and not earnest invocations of a deity. It has been noted that the term does not describe any school of thought within deism itself.^[61]

See also

- American Enlightenment
- Ceremonial deism
- Deism in England and France in the 18th century
- letsism
- Infinitism
- List of deists
- Moralistic therapeutic deism

- [Nicodemite](#)
- [Non-physical entity](#)
- [Religious affiliations of presidents of the United States](#)
- [Theistic evolution](#)
- [Theistic rationalism](#)
- [Transcendentalism](#)
- [Unitarian Universalism](#)

References

1. R. E. Allen (ed) (1990). *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*. Oxford University Press.
2. "Deist – Definition and More from the Free Merriam-Webster Dictionary" (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/deist>). Merriam-webster.com. 2012. Retrieved 2012-10-10.
3. "Deism" (<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/156154/Deism>). *Encyclopædia Britannica*. 2012. "In general, deism refers to what can be called natural religion, the acceptance of a certain body of religious knowledge that is inborn in every person or that can be acquired by the use of reason and the rejection of religious knowledge when it is acquired through either revelation or the teaching of any church."
4. "Deism" (<http://jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/5049-deism>). *Jewish Encyclopedia*. 1906. Retrieved 2012-10-10. "DEISM: A system of belief which posits God's existence as the cause of all things, and admits its perfection, but rejects Divine revelation and government, proclaiming the all-sufficiency of natural laws."
5. Gomes, Alan W. (2011). "Deism". *The Encyclopedia of Christian Civilization*. doi:10.1002/9780470670606.wbecc0408 (<https://doi.org/10.1002%2F9780470670606.wbecc0408>). ISBN 9781405157629. "Deism is a rationalistic, critical approach to theism with an emphasis on natural theology. The deists attempted to reduce religion to what they regarded as its most foundational, rationally justifiable elements. Deism is not, strictly speaking, the teaching that God wound up the world like a watch and let it run on its own, though that teaching was embraced by some within the movement."
6. Viret described deism as a heretical development of Italian Renaissance naturalism, resulting from misuse of the liberty conferred by the Reformation to criticise idolatry and superstition. Viret, Pierre (1564). *Instruction Chrétienne en la doctrine de la foi et de l'Évangile (Christian teaching on the doctrine of faith and the Gospel)*. Viret wrote that a group of people believed, like the Jews and Turks, in a God of some kind - but regarded the doctrine of the evangelists and the apostles as a mere myth. Contrary to their own claim, he regarded them as atheists.
7. Bayle, Pierre (1820). "Viret". *Dictionnaire historique et critique* (<https://books.google.com/books?id=pHAHjxIW7uEC>) (in French). 14 (Nouvelle ed.). Paris: Desoer. Retrieved 2017-11-23. (1697/1820) Bayle quotes Viret (see below) as follows: "J'ai entendu qu'il y en a de ceste bande, qui s'appellent déistes, d'un mot tout nouveau, lequel ils veulent opposer à l'athéiste," remarking on the term as a neologism (*un mot tout nouveau*). (p.418)

8. Orr, John (1934). *English Deism: Its Roots and Its Fruits*. Eerdmans. The words deism and theism are both derived words meaning "god" - "THE": Latin ZEUS-deus /"deist" and Greek theos/ "theist" (θεός). The word deus/déiste first appears in French in 1564 in a work by a Swiss Calvinist named Pierre Viret, but was generally unknown in France until the 1690s when Pierre Bayle published his famous Dictionary, which contained an article on Viret. "Prior to the 17th Century the terms ["deism" and "deist"] were used interchangeably with the terms "theism" and "theist", respectively. .. Theologians and philosophers of the 17th Century began to give a different signification to the words. .. Both [theists and deists] asserted belief in one supreme God, the Creator. .. But the theist taught that God remained actively interested in and operative in the world which he had made, whereas the Deist maintained that God endowed the world at creation with self-sustaining and self-acting powers and then surrendered it wholly to the operation of these powers acting as second causes." (p.13)
9. Basil Willey, *The Seventeenth Century Background: Studies in the Thought of the Age in Relation to Poetry and Religion*, 1934, p.59ff.
10. Gay. (see above). "By utilizing his wide classical learning, Blount demonstrated how to use pagan writers, and pagan ideas, against Christianity. ... Other Deists were to follow his lead." (pp.47-48)
11. Note that Locke himself was not a deist. He believed in both miracles and revelation. See Orr, pp.96-99.
12. Gay. (see above). "Among the Deists, only Anthony Collins (1676–1729) could claim much philosophical competence; only Conyers Middleton (1683–1750) was a really serious scholar. The best known Deists, notably John Toland (1670–1722) and Matthew Tindal (1656–1733), were talented publicists, clear without being deep, forceful but not subtle. ... Others, like Thomas Chubb (1679–1747), were self-educated freethinkers; a few, like Thomas Woolston (1669–1731), were close to madness." (pp.9-10)
13. "Deism | religious philosophy" (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Deism>). *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Retrieved 2017-09-27.
14. Gay. (see above). Gay describes him (pp.78-79) as "a Deist in fact, if not in name".
15. Waring. (see above). p.107.
16. Stephen, Leslie (1881). *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century 3rd Edition 2 vols (reprinted 1949)* (<http://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/001915511>). London: Smith, Elder & Co. ISBN 978-0844614212. Stephen's book, despite its "perhaps too ambitious" title (preface, Vol.I p.vii), was conceived as an "account of the deist controversy" (p.vi). Stephen notes the difficulty of interpreting the primary sources, as religious toleration was yet far from complete in law, and entirely not a settled fact in practice (Ch.II s.12): deist authors "were forced to .. cover [their opinions] with a veil of decent ambiguity." He writes of deist books being burned by the hangman, mentions the Aikenhead blasphemy case (1697) [1] (https://en.m.wikisource.org/wiki/Indytmnt_of_Thomas_Aikenhead), and names five deists who were banished, imprisoned etc.
17. Gay (Fröhlich), Peter Joachim, ed. (1968). *Deism: An Anthology* (<https://books.google.com/books?id=1kruAAAAMAAJ>). Princeton etc: Van Nostrand. ISBN 978-0686474012.
 - "All Deists were in fact both critical and constructive Deists. All sought to destroy in order to build, and reasoned either from the absurdity of Christianity to the need for a new philosophy or from their desire for a new philosophy to the absurdity of Christianity. Each deist, to be sure, had his special competence. While one specialized in abusing priests, another specialized in rhapsodies to nature, and a third specialized in the skeptical reading of sacred documents. Yet whatever strength the movement had—and it was at times formidable—it derived that strength from a peculiar combination of critical and constructive elements." (p.13)

18. Tindal: "By natural religion, I understand the belief of the existence of a God, and the sense and practice of those duties which result from the knowledge we, by our reason, have of him and his perfections; and of ourselves, and our own imperfections, and of the relationship we stand in to him, and to our fellow-creatures; so that the religion of nature takes in everything that is founded on the reason and nature of things." *Christianity as Old as the Creation* (II), quoted in Waring (see above), p.113.
19. Toland: "I hope to make it appear that the use of reason is not so dangerous in religion as it is commonly represented .. There is nothing that men make a greater noise about than the "mysteries of the Christian religion". The divines gravely tell us "we must adore what we cannot comprehend" .. [Some] contend [that] some mysteries may be, or at least seem to be, contrary to reason, and yet received by faith. [Others contend] that no mystery is contrary to reason, but that all are "above" it. On the contrary, we hold that reason is the only foundation of all certitude .. Wherefore, we likewise maintain, according to the title of this discourse, that *there is nothing in the Gospel contrary to reason, nor above it; and that no Christian doctrine can be properly called a mystery.*" *Christianity Not Mysterious: or, a Treatise Shewing That There Is Nothing in the Gospel Contrary to Reason, Nor above It* (1696), quoted in Waring (see above), pp.1–12
20. Stephens, William. *An Account of the Growth of Deism in England* (<http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/37302>). Retrieved 2019-01-04. (1696 / 1990). Introduction (James E. Force, 1990): "[W]hat sets the Deists apart from even their most latitudinarian Christian contemporaries is their desire to lay aside scriptural revelation as rationally incomprehensible, and thus useless, or even detrimental, to human society and to religion. While there may possibly be exceptions, .. most Deists, especially as the eighteenth century wears on, agree that revealed Scripture is nothing but a joke or "well-invented flam." About mid-century, John Leland, in his historical and analytical account of the movement [*View of the Principal Deistical Writers* [\[2\]](https://catalog.athitrust.org/Record/008682251) (<https://catalog.athitrust.org/Record/008682251>) (1754–1755)], squarely states that the rejection of revealed Scripture is *the* characteristic element of deism, a view further codified by such authorities as Ephraim Chambers and Samuel Johnson. .. "DEISM," writes Stephens bluntly, "is a denial of all reveal'd Religion.""
21. Champion, J.A.I. (2014). *The Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken: The Church of England and its Enemies, 1660-1730*. Cambridge University Press (Cambridge Studies in Early Modern British History). Champion maintains that historical argument was a central component of the deists' defences of what they considered true religion.
22. Paine, Thomas. *The Age of Reason*. "As priestcraft was always the enemy of knowledge, because priestcraft supports itself by keeping people in delusion and ignorance, it was consistent with its policy to make the acquisition of knowledge a real sin." (Part 2, p.129)
23. "It can't be imputed to any defect in the light of nature that the pagan world ran into idolatry, but to their being entirely governed by priests, who pretended communication with their gods, and to have thence their revelations, which they imposed on the credulous as divine oracles. Whereas the business of the Christian dispensation was to destroy all those traditional revelations, and restore, free from all idolatry, the true primitive and natural religion implanted in mankind from the creation." *Christianity as Old as the Creation* (XIV), quoted in Waring (see above), p.163.
24. Orr. (see above). p.134.
25. Orr. (see above). p.78.
26. Orr. (see above). p.137.

27. Age of Reason, Pt I:

I believe in one God, and no more; and I hope for happiness beyond this life.

and (in the Recapitulation)

I trouble not myself about the manner of future existence. I content myself with believing, even to positive conviction, that the power that gave me existence is able to continue it, in any form and manner he pleases, either with or without this body; and it appears more probable to me that I shall continue to exist hereafter than that I should have had existence, as I now have, before that existence began.

28. Most American deists, for example, firmly believed in divine providence. See this article, Deism in the United States.
29. See for instance Paine, Thomas. *The Age of Reason*., Part 1.
30. David Hartley, for example, described himself as "quite in the necessitarian scheme. See Ferg, Stephen, "Two Early Works of David Hartley", *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, vol. 19, no. 2 (April 1981), pp. 173–89.
31. See for example *Liberty and Necessity* (1729).
32. Hume himself was uncomfortable with both terms, and Hume scholar Paul Russell has argued that the best and safest term for Hume's views is *irreligion*. Russell, Paul (2005). "Hume on Religion" (<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hume-religion/>). *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Retrieved 2009-12-17.
33. Hume, David (1779). *The Natural History of Religion*. "The primary religion of mankind arises chiefly from an anxious fear of future events; and what ideas will naturally be entertained of invisible, unknown powers, while men lie under dismal apprehensions of any kind, may easily be conceived. Every image of vengeance, severity, cruelty, and malice must occur, and must augment the ghastliness and horror which oppresses the amazed religionist. .. And no idea of perverse wickedness can be framed, which those terrified devotees do not readily, without scruple, apply to their deity." (Section XIII)
34. Waring. (see above).
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External links

- [World Union of Deists \(https://www.deism.com/\)](https://www.deism.com/)
 - [Church of The Modern Deist \(http://moderndeist.org/\)](http://moderndeist.org/)
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